

Public procurement legislation and the acquisition of library materials in academic libraries in Malawi

Academic
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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper was to examine the challenges and opportunities the new public procurement legislation has created for academic librarians as regards the acquisition of library materials in academic libraries (university/college libraries) in Malawi.

Design/methodology/approach – The study used a multi-method approach. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires. The questionnaires were sent online to the university/college libraries of seven major accredited public universities in Malawi. After an initial analysis of that data, qualitative data on patterns were obtained through a mailing listserve with all the possible 19 librarians. Responses were analysed and categorised using a thematic approach.

Findings – Academic libraries (university/college libraries) are involved in the internal procurement committees. Librarians are represented in internal procurement committees, though their representation differs from one institution to another. All the academic libraries (university/college libraries) either use the centralised or independent procurement methods. As a result, the public university libraries deal with agents as independents. Working as independents has negatively affected the libraries, as materials are procured at different prices and sometimes at higher prices, thereby ignoring the value for money.

Research limitations/implications – In academic libraries, the library consortia have pulled resources towards a basket fund for wide access and cheaper licensing. However, for print library materials, a collaborative procurement process in which the academic libraries identify an agent capable of achieving a supplier list and then purchase directly from the preferred suppliers seems not to have been tried in the most developing countries.

Practical implications – The study suggests that academic libraries (university/college libraries) should emulate the library consortia approach when dealing with agents. The academic libraries should consider collaborative procurement models as a means of procuring library materials.

Originality/value – Since the enactment of the public procurement legislation in Malawi, no research has been documented on the challenges and opportunities the public procurement act and the acquisition of library materials. This research seeks to bridge the literature gap.

Keywords Academic libraries, Malawi, Library materials, Collaborative procurement model, Public procurement legislation

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

Public procurement services and structures in Malawi are fragmented with ministries and departments having their own internal procurement committees. Corrupt practices

in the procurement of goods and services are widespread. According to the [World Economic Forum \(2010\)](#), the diversion of public funds to companies, individuals or groups in Malawi due to corruption scored 3.9 on a 7-point scale constituting less competitive business advantage. A score of 3.3 was registered against business executives who favoured public officials when deciding upon policies and contract. The [World Bank Survey \(2009\)](#) reported that 10.3 per cent of the companies were found to give gifts to secure a contract, though the average value of a gift expected to secure a public contract was only 0.14 per cent of the contract value. The survey also indicated that 44 per cent of public officials acknowledged that some level of procurement contracts in their organisations involved payments of bribes. Also, 68 per cent of the companies indicated that at least some procurement contracts in their sectors involved payments of bribes; the mean estimate was 3.74 per cent of the contract value offered through bribe to secure a contract; 67 per cent of companies stated that inducement was an incentive to secure payment for services offered to the Government.

[World Bank Report \(1998\)](#) stated that public procurement in Malawi was shrouded in corruption and fraud. The report indicated that corruption involving public procurement was common in the supply of books, especially in primary and secondary school books, computers, vehicles and construction and service contracting. Local procurement was perceived to be affected by corruption with widespread kickbacks. As a procedure, tenders would be published in local newspapers. However, supplying firms complained that this was done after the tender period was completed ([World Bank Report, 1998](#)). This meant that responsible bidders had insufficient time to prepare their bidding documents and submit for competitive bidding. The World Bank Report also indicated that there was little private sector confidence in the procurement processes as the majority of the local firms believed that tenders could be rigged at will.

Procurement in university/college libraries

For a long time, library materials procurement has been the privy of the library acquisitions and collection development sections or units. According to [IFLA Online \(2014\)](#), the acquisition and collection development section focuses on the processes of planning and building a balanced collection of library materials over a period of time. This is based on assessment of needs of the library clientele; usage statistics analysis constrained by budgetary limitations. The acquisition process may involve the selection criteria, resource sharing as in cooperative decision making, planning for the new collections and subject areas concerned and selecting and evaluating options for access.

The acquisition process may be done through purchasing, exchange, gift or legal deposits. However, the overall process includes: selecting and evaluating supply sources, negotiating prices and licenses, ordering, receiving, claiming and issuing payment. In short, all the value chain stages, namely: determining collection requirements, selecting and managing suppliers, planning, placing, monitoring and processing orders, are within the privy of the acquisition and development unit.

Many authors have written extensively on acquisitions, access and management of library collections, ranging from print to electronic resources ([Lehman, 2014](#); [Ferris and Buck, 2014](#); [Walters, 2013](#), [Morrisey, 2008](#)). Library stock procurement contributes significantly towards total library expenditure for university/college libraries. According to the [Publishers Communication Group Online \(2014\)](#), overall library budgets were predicted to increase in 2013 by 0.8 per cent and the materials budget alone

by 0.7 per cent. However, despite the prediction, the annual estimated budgets are continuously being reduced year in, year out, suggesting that there is a downward pressure on estimated budgets against static materials budgets. Research suggests that this downward trend will continue for sometime.

Multiple researches have been carried out on acquisitions, access and management of library collections and procurement challenges (Sathyanarayana, 2013; Hodge *et al.*, 2013; Pennell, 2006). Problems on acquisitions, access and management of library collections range from insufficient number of book shops or sellers, inadequate foreign currency necessitating direct purchasing from foreign vendor, insufficient number of local publishers; inadequate funding; attempts by booksellers to supply old books at new prices; and delayed supply of foreign books among other challenges (Ameen, 2008). Further, a survey of Victorian public libraries by the Whitehorse Strategic Group Report (2007) indicated that prior to public procurement legislation, determination of collection requirements had a 45 per cent rate of turnover, as collections were poorly aligned to the library users demands and services; 60 per cent of the libraries had no written contracts with their suppliers. Not only that, a variety of procurement practices were being followed which were coupled with flaws in receiving and processing orders.

Concerns in public procurement flaws have propelled the enactment of public procurement laws in many countries. Indirectly, academic (university/college) libraries have to comply with the new legislations. This is partly because, by law, there is the need to review goods and services against the available offers. There is also the need to assess the best value for money against goods and services offered. While there is a general consensus to regulate public procurement, Thai (2001) noted that public procurement research interests by academicians have been neglected. Worse is in academic (university/college) libraries, as there is little research output on the impact of public procurement legislation on procurement in university or college libraries. It is against this background that this research seeks to examine the effects of public procurement legislation in academic (university/college) libraries in Malawi. There are four public universities in Malawi. The University of Malawi, a federal institution with four college libraries, namely: Chancellor College Library, established in 1965; Malawi Polytechnic Library, established in 1965; Kamuzu College of Nursing Library, established in 1979; and the College of Medicine Library, established in 1991 (University of Malawi Libraries, 2008). The other public universities are: Mzuzu University, established in 1997; the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, established in 2012; and the Malawi University of Science and Technology, established in 2013.

Public procurement reforms and legislation in Malawi

In 1994, soon after the change of government from an autocratic to a democratic system of Government, the Malawian Government removed the waiver on import duty enjoyed by companies supplying goods and services to the Government. The Government also introduced a cash budget system. These two policy directives had negative consequences on procurement of materials. The waiver meant that all suppliers needed to pay import duty and few suppliers were able to pay the import duty. Indirectly, there was loss of income for the suppliers and stiff competition for local companies as they competed with international organisations for the supply of works, goods and services to the Government. In regards to the cash budget system, Chiweza (2000) observed that

the system meant that organisations dependent on government funding had to submit monthly cash flows, and allocations would be made monthly on the basis of the government revenue collected during the previous month. In the case of the University of Malawi Libraries, the cash budget system made it almost impossible to effect large payments of monies for such items as books, periodicals and document supply services (Chiweza, 2000).

In 1996, a study commissioned by the Government on public procurement system in Malawi revealed massive shortfalls such as huge financial losses coming from the way procurement was being managed in the country (Office of the Director of Public Procurement, 2006). By then, till 1999, procurement of goods was under the Central Government Stores and the Central Tender Board (Office of the Director of Public Procurement, 2006). In early 2000s, the Government announced that the Central Tender Board should be dissolved. The Government also directed that all public procurements should be handled by the Government Contracting-out Unit. Government Contracting-out Unit was also mandated to initiate public procurement reforms. One of the reforms was to engage a consultant to draft the public procurement legislation for Malawi (Office of the Director of Public Procurement, 2006).

Before the public procurement legislation in Malawi, Central Government Stores were heavily criticised. The World Bank Report (1998) observed that purchasing procedures could not be followed, and staff charged with purchasing supplies for departments could arrange contracts with themselves for the supply of goods, works and services. In some cases, prices would be adjusted to avoid competitive bidding. The World Bank Report (1998) further indicated that the share of Government budget to risk of fraud and corruption was substantial as public procurement consumed between 5 to 10 per cent of the gross domestic product. The inclusion of statutory corporations and other semi-autonomous organisations meant that the loss was closer to 10 per cent of the gross domestic product.

In 2003, the Government drafted the Public Procurement Bill, which was later enacted into law. The following year, in 2004, guided by the Public Procurement Act (Malawi National Assembly, 2003), the Office of the Director of Public Procurement was established. The Public Procurement Act provided for principles and procedures to be applied when procuring goods, works and services (Malawi National Assembly, 2003). The Office of the Director of Public Procurement was established to regulate public procurement to ensure transparency, accountability and value for money (World Bank, 2004). It was envisioned that by having a vibrant and corrupt-free public procurement system, the Government would channel its resources to priority areas such as better nutrition, health care, quality education, good governance and help to improve the people's well-being. The Public Procurement Act provided for the establishment of the internal procurement committees in all government ministries, departments, parastatal organisations and other public administration entities in Malawi (Malawi National Assembly, 2003).

Literature review

The procurement industry has been faced with numerous challenges, ranging from poor service delivery, lack of accountability, transparency, corruption and financial mismanagement (Mofokeng, 2013). The procurement entity has faced some challenges partly because of the inability to identify priorities within priorities, under-spending of

budgets and flaws in the procurement process (Taylor *et al.*, 2008). Mofokeng further (2013) noted that problems with the public sector procurement included: widespread non-compliance to the laws and regulations; poor public sector procurement system and processes; lack of transparency; lack of accountability; lack of ethical behaviour and consistency; non-responsiveness of public interests; waste of public resources and poor service delivery. Goss (2010) indicated that because of poor procurement processes, the tax payer pays excessively for goods and services. This has been alluded to bribery costs, incompetency, fraud and corruption, impartiality and lack of integrity of the procurement process. The purchasing models at Brisbane Library Services was able to save up to 30 per cent on shelf-ready items; improved delivery time to libraries, increased positive image of the libraries and economies of scale (Robertson and Catoggio, 2007). According to Liddle (2007), and based on a selection of ten key measures addressing aspects of supply, demand and operational effectiveness, the cooperative purchasing models consistently out-performed the stand-alone procurement models.

Models of public procurement in libraries before the public procurement legislations

According to the Whitehorse Strategic Report (2007), there are a variety of library procurement models in operation. The models have various details of operations, but are generally based on the degree of collaboration involved and the extent to which procurement functions are handled by individual library services or an agent of the library. Three of these are:

- (1) *Independent or local model*: The independent model or the local model is a model in which each library purchases directly from the suppliers or agents. All purchasing transactions, namely, the order, delivery or supply, invoice and payment, are conducted directly between the library and the supplier (Colwell, 2011; Whitehorse Strategic Group Report, 2007). The problem lies in the facts that libraries approach the book suppliers as individuals, and on the economy of scale, the book suppliers make more gains as compared to several libraries working jointly and approaching the vendor at the same time.
- (2) *Collaborative model or networked model*: In the collaborative or networked model, a limited form of collaborative purchasing is undertaken. An agent acting on behalf of the libraries conduct a competitive process in the supplier market with the aim of developing a preferred suppliers list. Individual library services purchase directly from suppliers on the preferred supplier list, undertaking the normal exchange process with the suppliers (Colwell, 2011). Activities are coordinated across local units, while decision-makings are not independent but controlled in some way by a node or nodes on the network (Colwell, 2011). According to the UK National Audit Office (2010), collaborative procurement saves money and allows public bodies to aggregate demand and compare unit costs. In this case, lower prices result either from economies of scale, or from using pricing information to challenge suppliers. According to the same, collaboration results in a fewer occasions of tendering and reduces administrative costs. Dominick (2012) highlights four collaborative procurement models as involving: collaborating with internal departments in which a cross-functional team collaborates on all aspects of a sourcing project; collaborating with suppliers; collaborating with other procurement organisations to increase leverage in which an organisation joins a buying

consortium for lower costs and avoid reinventing the wheel; and collaborating with mission-driven organisations to socially increase the use of locally sourced products and gain more recognition. This is common with library consortia.

- (3) *Centralised model*: In the centralised model, in addition to the agent undertaking exchange activity on behalf of the library services, the agent also performs a competitive process with respect to the supplier market. Library service providers input their requirements to the agent but do not undertake direct exchange activity with suppliers. In this model, material funding is provided directly to the agent from the funding authorities by passing the library services. Sometimes the library services themselves provide funds from their materials budgets to the agent on an agreed basis. OECD (2000) has argued that centralised procurement model significantly reduces prices of goods and services; offers better services at lower costs; increases purchasing power for the centralised agency; requires less need for technical standardisation in terms of information technology systems and software; has non-cost benefits including greater attention to contract management and better problem resolution in terms of faulty items, below specification services and after-sale maintenance; lower costs of training staff because they are fewer in number and centrally located; easier performance management of staff; and encourages transparency and effective management controls and audit trail.

Systems of tendering in public procurement

Literature is awash with public procurement systems and legislation that have been adopted in different countries worldwide. Most of these reforms have been initiated by international organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Public procurement legislations have recognised open, restricted, competitive dialogue and negotiated tendering systems, as appropriate for public procurement (Medoza and Kotschwar, 1999). Medoza and Kotschwar (1999) further observed that the tendering systems prefer selection of materials based on the “lowest evaluated price”.

Open tendering. Use of open tendering as a default method of procurement maximises competition and provides access to a wider domestic or international procurement market. Medoza and Kotschwar (1999) argues that the use of price-based criteria for selection of bidders has strengthened the integrity of the procurement system, delivered lower prices and developed a fair climate and promoted efficiency in public procurement. By allowing request for quotations from approved entities, the open system tendering has been seen to be fair and efficient. Unlike other tendering systems, with open tendering, all suppliers are requested to tender their bidding documents and there is no pre-qualification or short-listing of bidders prior to invitation for bidders. All interested parties are requested to submit their tenders in response to the notices through various forms of media such as local newspapers. Bidders can also ask for a copy of the contract in advance.

Restricted tendering. Unlike open tendering, in restricted tendering, suppliers respond to adverts by expressing interest in bidding. Bidders are requested to complete a pre-qualification form that shows their experience and resources to meet the needs of the procurement entity. All interested bidders that have expressed an interest in meeting

the requirements of the contracting authority are invited to compete. Negotiations between the contracting authority and tenders are sometimes allowed.

Negotiated tender. A negotiated tender uses a pre-qualification stage in which the procuring entity is allowed to negotiate the terms of the contract within strict guidelines prior to awarding the contract. Usually, this is accepted when the supplier is the sole source of the goods or services required, or when the precise specification can only be determined by negotiation.

Competitive dialogue. A competitive dialogue procedure is used for complex contracts where an open or restricted tender procedure will not allow the award of a procurement contract. Suppliers respond to advertisements by submitting an expression of interest in the tender and complete a pre-qualification questionnaire. Suppliers who are shortlisted are then invited to participate in a competitive dialogue. The dialogue is flexible and may include written or verbal submissions and interviews. The dialogue takes place in successive stages to reduce the number of potential suppliers, and at the conclusion of the dialogue the procuring entity asks for potential suppliers to submit their final tender.

Principles of public procurement

[Central Procurement Directorate Online \(2014\)](#) highlights 12 principles of public procurement as including accountability, competitive supply, consistency, effectiveness, efficiency, fair dealing, integration, integrity, informed decision making, legality, responsiveness and transparency. [Raymond \(2008\)](#), citing the Commonwealth Procurement Guidelines, summarised the 12 principles into 5 as including getting value for money, efficiency and effectiveness, competition, accountability and transparency, and ethics and industry development. Amongst the principles, the value for money for citizens through client satisfaction, the public interest, fair play, honesty, justice and equity rates highly ([Barrett, 2000](#); [Korosec and Bartle, 2003](#)).

[Raymond \(2008\)](#) identified five key principles underpinning procurement, namely: value for money, ethics, competition, transparency and accountability.

Value for money. Value for money entails consideration of the contribution to be made to advancing policies and priorities aimed at achieving the best return and performance for the money ([Raymond, 2008](#)). According to the [Public Procurements Best Practice Guide Online \(2014\)](#), to obtain the best value for money entails considering the acquisition cost, cost of maintenance and running costs, disposal cost of a purchase and its quality and ability to meet the contracting authority's requirements. According to [Mofokeng \(2013\)](#), value for money should satisfy public needs and yield wealth at an optimal cost.

Ethics. Ethics are the moral principles or values that guide officials in all aspects of their work. Ethical behaviour encompasses the concepts of integrity, diligence, honesty, probity, fairness, trust, respect, consistency, avoiding conflicts of interest and not making improper use of an individual's position. According to [Raymond \(2008\)](#), employees of public entities are expected to behave in a manner congruent to their codes of ethics.

Competition. Competition avoids accusations of favouritism and fraud and that the openness of the system encourages more suppliers to participate ([Mofokeng, 2013](#)). In doing so, increased competition helps reduce prices, improves quality and leads to greater competitiveness among suppliers ([Raymond, 2008](#)).

Transparency. Raymond (2008) noted that key to transparency is for the stakeholders to see and judge the quality of actions and decisions. Transparency involves agencies taking steps to enable appropriate scrutiny of the procurement activity (Kashap, 2004).

Accountability. Accountability means that officials are responsible for the actions and decisions that they take in relation to procurement and for the resulting outcomes (Huque, 2011) According to Mofokeng (2013), accountability refers to the extent in which the procuring entity is able to respond to queries to the general public and the public entity management.

Research objectives and questions

The main objective of this research is to look at the impact of the public procurement legislation on the acquisition of library materials in academic (university/college) libraries in Malawi. The research questions were as follows:

- RQ1. What systems of procurement do the academic (university/college) libraries use before the public procurement legislation?
- RQ2. How involved are academic (university/college) librarians in the procurement of library materials?
- RQ3. What challenges do the libraries face in the procurement of library materials?
- RQ4. How can academic (university/college) libraries overcome the challenges faced?

Methodology

Seven public universities/colleges that draw their funding from the consolidated Government through monthly subvention were targeted. These institutions were set by the Government through acts of parliament and are, therefore, subjected to the Public Procurement Act. Private universities were not targeted because the Act does not affect them and they do not draw any funding from the Government. For the government-funded institutions, the study used a multi-method approach. First quantitative data were collected through questionnaires. "The questionnaires were sent via email to the librarians in the seven academic libraries of the public universities/colleges in Malawi, namely: Chancellor College, Kamuzu College of Nursing, College of Medicine and Polytechnic; Mzuzu University, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Malawi University of Science and Technology." The first four are federal colleges of the University of Malawi. Only, three university/college librarians from the seven public universities/colleges replied to the questionnaire, and the "yes" and "no" data obtained did not indicate patterns on how they comply with the Public Procurement Act. To establish the patterns, the researcher used a list serve mailing list targeting all possible 19 librarians from the ranks of assistant librarians, college librarians and university librarians. Various email responses and counter-responses generated data that highlighted patterns in the procuring of library materials from within the libraries. The responses were analysed and categorised using a thematic approach.

Results

The research-collected qualitative data have been presented and analysed thematically by identifying the common patterns as obtained from the responses both through questionnaires and online discussions.

Systems of procuring library materials

The research objective was to find out how academic (university/college) libraries in Malawi were procuring library materials before the public procurement legislation. The responses indicate two patterns:

- *Pattern 1:* Each individual library purchased library materials directly from the chosen suppliers. Orders, delivery or supply, invoices and payments were directly between the library and the supplier. This is the main procurement system adopted, as the university/colleges are independent from each other. Colwell (2011) has referred to this procurement model as the local model, while Whitehorse Strategic Group Report (2007) refers to it as the individual model. In this model, all activities, decision-making for procurement and control is performed locally and autonomously.
- *Pattern 2:* The centralised model was also mentioned by the librarians. In this model, material funding is provided directly from the Government, bypassing the libraries themselves to the distributing agents. In 2009/2010 and 2010/2011, the University of Malawi Colleges used the centralised procurement model for procuring library materials. In this model, decision-making and procurement activities are centralised in such a way that activities and controls are outside the scope of the procuring entities. For example, calling off suppliers under a centralised negotiated contract is almost non-existent.

Involvement of librarians in procurement process

The research objective here was to find out how involved academic (university/college) librarians are in procuring library materials. Involvement in the procurement of library materials is a lengthy process. The researcher selected some of the processes and wanted to get views from librarians on how they are involved. The activities include:

Activity 1: Internal procurement committee representation. All the academic (university/college) libraries acknowledged their representation in the internal procurement committees, but at different stages. It was also noted that the representation was not uniform. The cases identified followed this pattern:

- *Pattern A:* Only the head of the library department is invited to the internal procurement committee meetings. In his or her absence, the library is not represented.
- *Pattern B:* The library head is invited, but in his absence he/she delegates and any sectional head available to represent the library department.
- *Pattern C:* The library and the sectional heads represent their departments at different stages of the same procurement processes. For example, a sectional head representing the library departments at the bid opening stage, while the head of the library represents the libraries at the evaluation stage.

Activity 2: Formulation of the procurement plan. Two patterns emerged from this study. A pattern where the procurement department/unit does everything, and a pattern where the library is requested to have its input:

- *Pattern M:* The library department requests the procuring officers on what needs to be procured. The procuring department formulates a plan which includes

specifications, quantities, procurement method and estimated costs. This document is distributed to the all departments.

- *Pattern N:* The library department submits the list of items to be procured with specifications and estimated costs. The procuring department does the rest.

Activity 3: Appropriation of library materials

- *Pattern P:* The procurement department calculates how much it would cost to buy the library materials.
- *Pattern Q:* The library department submits estimates for the materials to be procured.

Activity 4: Advertisement of procurement of library materials

- *Pattern X:* The procurement department advertises after informing the department concerned.
- *Pattern Y:* The procuring department does not inform the library department when advertising the submissions.

Activity 5: Prequalification of library material suppliers before tendering

- *Pattern U:* The library department is invited to the pre-qualification of the bidders or possible suppliers of the goods.
- *Pattern W:* The procuring department does not invite the library departments, and assumes all the responsibilities for identifying possible suppliers of the goods.

Activity 6: Bid opening of library materials

- *Pattern F:* The procurement department invites the library departmental representatives before bid opening.
- *Pattern G:* The procurement department does not invite the library departmental representatives before bid opening.

Activity 6: Bid evaluation (technical and financial)

- *Pattern F:* The procurement department invites the library departmental head only during a bid evaluation for both technical and financial evaluations.
- *Pattern G:* The procurement department invites any representative from the library departmental during a bid evaluation for both technical and financial evaluations.

Activity 7: Influence of librarians in the awarding of contracts

- *Pattern J:* The procurement process allows the library department to have a say on the awardees.
- *Pattern K:* The procurement process does not allow the library department to have a say on the awardees. The lowest evaluated bidder carries the day.

Discussion of the findings

This research has found out that there are discrepancies within the procurement of library materials within the academic university/college libraries in Malawi. On

systems of procuring goods, the study has revealed that there are various procuring models. One approach termed “independent” or “local model” has been advocated for quite some time. In the independent procurement system, each library service purchases library materials directly from each of suppliers. This meant that almost all elements of the purchase transaction, namely: the order, delivery or supply, invoice and payment are conducted directly between the library service and the supplier (Colwell, 2011; Whitehorse Strategic Group Report, 2007). Literature indicates that the independent model has some advantages such as high flexibility in sourcing materials; it caters for local supply options and allows contracting out. However, the disadvantages outweigh the advantages partly because of high local procurement costs, high local administrative overheads, inefficient suppliers and little incentive to standardise (Colwell, 2011; Whitehorse Strategic Group Report, 2007).

On involvement of librarians in the internal procurement committees, the study has also indicated that there are variances. In some university/college libraries, it is only the head of the department who is represented, while in some colleges, it is any library officer from the rank of assistant librarian to college librarian who represents the interests of the librarians. On the formulation of procurement plans for the libraries, it was noted that some libraries have procurement plans while others do not. Those that do not have procurement plans have entrusted that responsibility with the university or college procurement departments or sections/units. Similarly true is the appropriation of library materials, advertisement, prequalification, bid opening and evaluation, as well as the actual awarding of contracts. It is either the librarians themselves are involved or they have entrusted the university or college procurement departments or sections/units. While this study did not take into account the capabilities of the librarians in their understanding of the technicalities of public procurement legislation, literature is awash with information that as the pace of change accelerates, libraries cannot afford to be good at everything. Instead libraries long decided their core competencies and concentrated on them by way of outsourcing surging services in demand due to inadequate capacity or expertise (Baker, 1998).

As regards which model or system of procurement is used, information gathered through an online group forum discussion indicated that some academic university libraries favoured single sourcing, while others were of the opinion that restricted tendering for library materials is the best. Librarians advocating for open tendering argued that is a good procuring method because it allows for new entrants into the field. While acknowledging the entrance of new entrants and thinking of libraries as single entities capable of procuring library materials locally or independent of each other, paradoxically, librarians in 2003 formed the Malawi Library and Information Consortium. The consortium has been responsible for collaborating with aggregators such as the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications and the electronic Information for Libraries, where they contribute towards the basket fund and subscribing to e-resources. However, with the passage of time, librarians have never thought of a similar arrangement which may allow them to collaboratively procure library materials such as library books.

However, further online discussion revealed that librarians were aware that the majority of the book distributors leap heavily from them. For example, it was argued that because of the open tendering system, local book suppliers with little experience and capital on the ground buy books from international publishers or agents and then

resell them to the academic (university/college) libraries at a bigger profit. In one college, it was noted that of the 300 titles, 50 were supplied by one publisher, 70 by another and 80 by yet another publisher, and the rest by another publisher. The agent bought the books from different publishers at a lower price and sold them to the college at exorbitant prices. This was seen as a sign of lack of transparency, integrity and value for money. Some librarians were of the view that the current procurement legislation has created chaos where they know who can supply the library materials they want, but cannot engage the suppliers directly because of tendering systems which require that certain procedures be followed even if the exercise is timely, expensive and complex before awarding the contracts.

On suggestions for the way forward, librarians observed that the current procurement process lacks integrity as the procurement process and the auditing trails lack proofs that a potential supplier has the goods that libraries are looking for. Secondly, it was noted that given proof that a potential local supplier does not have the goods that the libraries are interested in, libraries are justified to go for direct suppliers or agents. It was observed that it is possible to identify a supplier or suppliers who can supply all the required library materials as one block.

In case of international bidders, it was observed that the law indicates that a local bidder with less than 15 per cent bidding price to an international bidder has an advantage of being awarded the contract. Librarians noted that the margin is lower and has created situations where local suppliers are favoured at the expense of quality and value for money.

Unlike the independent or local model as the main means of obtaining library materials, the University of Malawi Librarians advocated for the “centralised model”, in which the University of Malawi Central Office undertakes exchange activity on behalf of the library services. In this model, library services input their requirements to the University of Malawi Central Office and the office deals with agents or suppliers. Materials funding could be provided directly to the agent or suppliers from the funding authorities bypassing the libraries. The Government, which is responsible for funding academic (university/college) libraries, directly funded University of Malawi Central Office, which in turn paid suppliers on behalf of the college libraries. The role of the libraries was simply to identify the materials and submit them to the University of Malawi Central Office. In 2009/2010 and 2010/2011, it was reported that University of Malawi Libraries used the centralised model in which the Government directly paid the materials budget to the suppliers. The centralised model reduces local procurement costs. It also reduces administrative overheads, increases bargaining power, reduces selling costs for preferred suppliers, encourages standardisation and creation of a central funding model. As regards disadvantages, the centralised model is least flexible, reduces local supply options and significantly central administration is required.

Recommendations

Discrepancies in the procurement of library materials have come to stay partly because of the public procurement legislation, which has placed rules and regulations safeguarding the procurement process in public institutions. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, many libraries responded to the rise in prices of the information resources, high cost of materials and budget cuts by established library consortia where financial resources contributed by the libraries would be put into a basket fund with the purposes

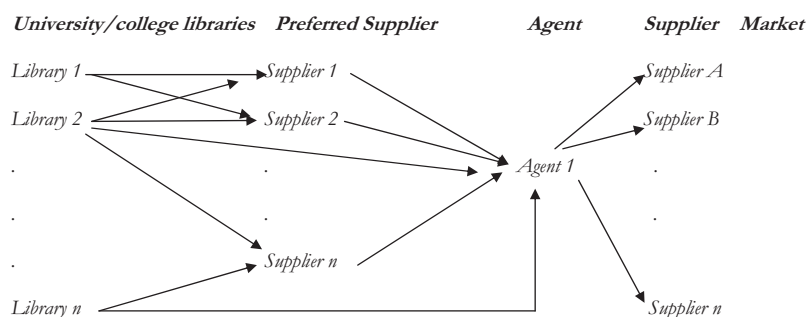
of negotiating better prices for e-resources. Aggregators such as the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications, the electronic Information for Libraries and the Research for Life have played a major role in e-resource access for developing countries. The establishment of library consortia continues to enable libraries to share access to information sources (Moghaddam and Talawar, 2009; Kinengyere, 2007). Even smaller libraries are benefiting from such library consortia. Similarly, this research seeks to recommend the collaborative purchasing model. The collaborative purchasing model identifies an agent acting on behalf of the libraries who conducts a competitive process in the supplier market with the aim of developing preferred supplier lists. The collaborative consortium model is likely to provide a number of benefits, which includes price reductions through aggregated purchasing. Advantages of the collaborative purchasing range from reduced local procurement costs, reduced administrative overheads, increased bargaining power, reduced selling costs for preferred suppliers and standardisation of the procurement system in the public university/college libraries. In Australia, the library stakeholders' satisfaction with their library models averaged 7.9 from a possible 10 and ranged from 8.4 and above for the cooperative model to 7.6 and below for the stand-alone model (Whitehorse Strategic Group Report, 2007).

Collaborative purchasing model

The model suggests that all academic (university/college) libraries can deal with book suppliers or publishers in one way or the other, depending on what they publish or have in stock. The current trend means that the academic libraries approach the preferred suppliers as individuals. Figure 1 suggests that as much as academic libraries have preferred suppliers, the collaborative purchasing model can identify an agent acting on behalf of the all the academic libraries and who is capable of conducting a competitive process in the supplier market with the aim of developing a preferred suppliers lists at a reduced rate.

In this model, the researcher seeks to suggest as follows:

- The academic libraries (1, 2, 3 [...] *n*) already approach multiple suppliers (1, 2, 3 [...] *n*) who are themselves not the publishers.



Source: Adopted and modified from the procurement model for Victorian public libraries (2007, p. 20)

Figure 1.
Collaborative
purchasing model for
academic libraries in
Malawi

- So many suppliers directly or indirectly approach one agent who has direct connections with the publishers.
- It is possible for the academic libraries to approach the one agent and achieve a preferred supplier list, and then purchase directly from the preferred suppliers.

Before it was dissolved, the Malawi Book Service was a good agent that was capable of undertaking the suppliers to make the preferred supplier list for academic libraries in Malawi. The Books Botswana continues to play a big role in the procurement of library materials for academic libraries in Botswana. In Australia, library and information associations have collaborative procurement models. Through the models the procurement services are vendor negotiated. Model partners offer assistance in forming buying groups where vendors offer exclusive prices.

Conclusion

While reforms in public procurement are being implemented all over the world, little literature is available on the challenges that public procurement legislations and regulatory bodies have posed in the supply and procurement industry. Reforms in public procurement systems are inevitable because they ensure transparency, accountability and value for money. However, there is little mention of the challenges of public procurement in academic (university/college) libraries. This research has indicated that procurement of library materials in academic (university/college) libraries follows different pattern. All libraries are represented in the various Internal Procurement Committees though the representation is at various levels. In terms of procurement models, the federal university with four colleges adopted both models such as local and sometimes centralised. The independent public universities used the local model. Overall, the academic (university/college) libraries approached book suppliers as sole buyers. The study recommends that academic (university/college) libraries should procure library materials collaboratively by identifying an agent who can achieve a preferred suppliers list from where all academic libraries can directly purchase from them. The library consortia approach that libraries have used to procure e-resources should be replicated in some way towards the procurement of key library materials such as library books. The study has implications in that little is known how the public procurement has affected academic libraries in Malawi and how they can collaborate towards collaborative procurement.

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Further reading

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Appendix. Open-ended questions and questions for open discussion

Instructions

Answer questions all questions briefly.

1. Tick the appropriate category for your library

Public university library	Please put a cross (x)
Mzuzu University Library	
UNIMA : Chancellor College Library	
UNIMA : Polytechnic Library	
UNIMA : Kamuzu College of Nursing Library	
UNIMA : College of Medicine Library	
Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources	

2. How involved is your library in the formulation of a procurement plan driven by the needs assessment?
3. How involved is the library in the appropriation (act of authorizing money to be paid from the accounts for a specified use) on the procurement of library materials?
4. How informed is the Library on what is being advertised on the procurement of library materials?
5. How transparent is the prequalification of library material suppliers before they are tendered?
6. How involved is the library in bid opening of library procurements?
7. How involved is the library in bid evaluation that includes technical and financial evaluations?
8. How represented is the Library at the college/University Internal Procurement Committee (IPC)?
9. How much influence does the library have on the award of contracts involving library procurements?
10. How affected is the library on the threshold set by the Office of the Director of Public Procurement for goods and services in relation to the procuring of library materials?
11. Procurement advocates for 5 main principles namely: 1) value for money, 2) efficiency and effectiveness, 3) competition, 4) accountability and transparency, 5) ethics and industry development. What is your assessment of the procurement process. Does it promote any of these?

End of Questions and thanks in advance

Figure A1.

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